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ABSTRACT

This paper examines remediation as the product of perceptions and beliefs about literacy and learning. It illustrates some ways teachers inadvertently participate in constructing inaccurate and limiting notions of learners as being cognitively defective and in need of "remedy," and thus limit classroom learning. It combines an empirical, fine-grained analysis of classroom discourse with broader historical and cultural analyses. The paper considers ways to examine these limiting basic assumptions, building, from a different ground, notions about students' abilities and the nature of literacy learning. The paper's first section analyzes closely a 50-minute classroom lesson on writing conducted in a remedial classroom at an urban college led by a highly rated teacher committed to her teaching. This section examines the class conversation in terms of its interactional patterns and the kinds of classroom discourse such patterns allow, and looks closely at one student, detailing the interactional processes that contribute to her being defined as remedial. The paper's second section examines the cultural context of school failure, noting the long history in American education of perceiving and treating low-achieving children as if they were lesser in character and fundamental ability. The paper's third section discusses four suggested means (remembering teacher development, attending to classroom discourse, making macro-micro connections, and rethinking the language of cultural difference) for teachers and researchers to examine their assumptions about remediation and remedial students. (Four figures containing transcripts of classroom discussions are included: there are 60 references and a transcription key. (Author/RS)

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Center for the Study of Writing

Technical Report No. 44

REMEDIATION AS SOCIAL CONSTRUCT: PERSPECTIVES FROM AN ANALYSIS OF CLASSROOM DISCOURSE

Glynda Hull, Mike Rose,
Kay Losey Fraser, and Marisa Castellano

February, 1991

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REMEDIATION AS SOCIAL CONSTRUCT: PERSPECTIVES FROM AN ANALYSIS OF CLASSROOM DISCOURSE

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In this paper, we examine remediation as a social construct, as the product of perceptions and beliefs about literacy and learning, and we illustrate some ways in which inaccurate and limiting notions of learners as being somehow cognitively defective and in need of "remedy" can be created and played out in the classroom. We will look closely at one student in one lesson and detail the interactional processes that contribute to her being defined as remedial—this specific case, however, is also representative of common kinds of classroom practices and widespread cultural assumptions, ones we've seen at work in our other studies (Hull & Rose, 1989). In order to better understand these cultural assumptions and the ways they can affect classroom practices, we will attempt to combine an empirical, fine-grained analysis of classroom discourse with broader historical and cultural analyses. We want to place the instructional and evaluative language a teacher uses in the contexts that we believe influence it, that contribute to the practice of defining students as remedial.

We write this paper believing that, however great the distance our profession has come in understanding the students and the writing we call "remedial," we have not yet come far enough in critically examining our assumptions about our students' abilities—assumptions which both shape the organization of remedial programs and orient daily life in remedial classrooms. Engaging in such an examination is not so easy, perhaps because as teachers of remedial writing, we have good intentions: we look forward to our students' growth and development as writers; we want to teach our students to be literate in ways sanctioned by the academy and the community beyond. And, knowing our intentions, we can forget to examine our assumptions about remediation—assumptions that are deeply held and so ingrained as to be tacit, that can, without much conscious choice on our part, drive the way we structure a course and circumscribe the learning that students will do in it. Our hope, then, is that this paper will be an occasion to reflect on the ways we, as teachers, can inadvertently participate in the social construction of attitudes and beliefs about remediation which may limit the learning that takes place in our classrooms, and to consider some ways in which we can begin to examine these basic assumptions, building from a different ground our notions about our students' abilities and the nature of literacy learning.

I. ANALYZING CLASSROOM DISCOURSE

The centerpiece of our discussion—a fifty-minute classroom lesson on writing conducted in a remedial classroom at an urban college[1]—was one of several that we

[1]The work reported here is part of a larger study, "Literacy, Underpreparation, and the Cognition of Composing." We gratefully acknowledge the support of the James S. McDonnell Foundation's Program in Cognitive Studies for Educational Practice, the Spencer Foundation, the National Center for the Study of Writing, and the National Council of Teachers of English Research Foundation.

videotaped across a semester. As regular observers in the class, we also collected field notes and records of reading and writing assignments and homework and essays. We conducted interviews with students and teachers as well, sometimes asking them to comment on the videotapes we had recently made of classroom lessons. Outside of class, we served as tutors and thereby were able to audiotape our conferences with students and to elicit additional writing and reading performances.

In our studies we have worked only with teachers rated highly by their departments and students. The teacher in this study was June, a recent and respected graduate of a long-standing composition program and a candidate for an advanced degree in literature. Our work with June confirmed her commitment to teaching. She spent a great deal of time responding to papers at home and meeting with students in conferences, and she was interested in discussing composition research and finding ways to apply it in her classroom. In fact, she volunteered to participate in our study because she saw it as an occasion to be reflective about her own teaching and to improve instruction for students in remedial classes.

The composition program in which June had studied was also a part of the college and included reading on and discussion of new composition theory and practice. Class size was reasonable (approximately 15 students), though June taught three sections requiring two different preparations while completing graduate school. A remedial writing course and a complementary reading course were required for entering students depending on their scores on entrance tests. In the writing course students kept a journal, made summaries of short reading passages, and wrote essays on assignments common to the program. Most of these assignments asked students to read short passages as background material and to use them as the basis for writing an essay on a specified topic related to the reading. One of these assignments gave rise to the classroom talk that we will analyze.

In this lesson, which took place the fourth week of the semester, June held a discussion to prepare students to write an essay on music videos and their appropriateness for viewers. The essay assignment consisted of a set of brief readings: a magazine article describing recently released and acclaimed rock videos; an editorial from a local newspaper on censorship; a review of the music video *Thriller*; a list of recent music videos with brief descriptions. The assignment then asked students to take part in current debates about the regulation of music videos, developing a position on the issue perhaps by arguing that videos ought to be banned from television, or that there should be no censorship, or that some kind of rating system should be developed. The assignment emphasized that students should justify their arguments and make clear their reasoning.

In the class June introduced the topic of music videos and, in preparation for the writing assignment, led a class discussion on accessibility and censorship issues. The discussion was, then, a kind of "pre-writing" activity, an attempt, June told us, to help students access their own knowledge and experiences and to draw upon them when writing an academic essay. "Many of these students don't have a lot to bring with them in terms of academic experience," she explained, "but they do have some life experiences to bring with them." What we want to do in our analysis of this lesson is to look closely at the conversation June had with her class, characterizing it in terms of its interactional patterns and the kinds of classroom discourse such patterns allow, and consider the relationship between one student's pattern of talk and the teacher's perception of her cognitive abilities.

Let us explain why we have chosen to examine talk as a way to study this writing class. In *The Social Construction of Literacy* Jenny Cook-Gumperz (1986) reminds us that literacy learning consists of more than the acquisition of cognitive skills; it also involves the "social process of demonstrating knowledgeability" (p. 3). In other words, competence in

classrooms means interactional competence as well as competence with written language: knowing when and how and with whom to speak and act in order to create and display knowledge. In the same way, then, that there are cultural "rules" for how to have conversations in particular contexts—the kinds of replies that are appropriate, the points at which it is acceptable to interrupt, the ways one might indicate attentiveness and interest—so there are rules for the talk that goes on in classrooms, rules students will need to know, at least tacitly.[2] From a significant amount of research on western schooling, it is clear that a great deal of classroom talk is led by the teacher, and that a particular kind of participant structure—or way of arranging verbal interaction (Philips, 1983)—dominates classroom conversations. This structure consists of a tripartite series of turns in which a teacher *initiates*, a student *replies*, and the teacher *evaluates* the student's response—the IRE sequence (Cazden, 1988; Mehan, 1979; Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975).[3] In the initiation, or opening turn, the teacher can inform, direct, or ask students for information. The student's reply to this initiation can be non-verbal, such as raising a hand or carrying out an action, or it can be a verbal response. In the evaluation turn, the teacher comments on the student's reply.

The following is an example of an IRE sequence in which June asks about music videos that students have seen lately. We first provide a plain transcript of this brief stretch of talk between teacher and students, and then we follow it with a second transcript (Figure 1) in which we attempt to capture some of the elements of speech that are lost when talk is written down—pauses, stress, and tempo, for instance—elements which suggest a speaker's communicative intentions. Such features, known as contextualization cues (Gumperz, 1982; in press), signal how an utterance is to be understood, including how it relates to what precedes or follows. According to this system, speakers' turns are segmented into idea or information units[4] on the basis of both semantics and intonation (rising or falling contours). Other features are also represented: lexical prosody, such as vowel elongation or fluctuation, and overlapping speech, where more than one person talks at a time. We think this method enhances the understanding of classroom interaction, and we will incorporate it into our discussion accordingly.

Here, first, is a plain transcript of the segment taken from June's classroom lesson, printed in columns to make the IRE sequence clear:

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[2]For other discussions of interactional classroom competence and reviews of previous work in this area, see Mehan (1980) and Corno (1989).

[3]We should point out, however, that most of the research identifying the IRE sequence has been done with classrooms in the elementary grades. For an exception to this, and an example of how the IRE participant structure can be used to analyze writing conferences, see Freedman and Katz (1987).

[4]The transcription conventions were developed by John Gumperz, with help from Wallace Chafe and Noreen Barantz. Gumperz has stressed that the system is more interpretive than descriptive, and the key to its proper usage is consistency.

Transcript #1

Initiation	Reply	Evaluation
Teacher: How 'bout *I Want Your Sex*, Matt? What would [you rate] that?		
	Matt: R.	
		Teacher: R. All right. The title of it might indicate right off the bat that it should be an R rated video. Okay.
Teacher: How 'bout some of the rest of you?		
	Maria: I, I, just seen *Like A Prayer*.	
		Teacher: Okay, *Like a Prayer*, all right, good.
Teacher: What, do you know what the rating would be on that one?		

Here is the same segment of classroom talk, this time with contextualization cues marked. The most prominent symbols in this segment are slash marks (/ and //), which signal a drop in voice tone and the end of a speaker's turn; double equal signs (==), which indicate when and where more than one person is speaking at once; asterisks (*), which label words that speakers are stressing; and indications of volume, pitch, and tempo in brackets—e.g., [p] means quieter speech, [f] means louder speech, [hi] means high-pitched speech. (For a full explanation of the symbols in this and our subsequent transcripts, see Appendix A.)

Figure 1: Transcript #1 with Contextualization Cues Marked

1 Teacher: how about i want your sex matt what would you rate that?
2 Matt: == r/
3 Teacher: r// alright//
4 the *title of it might-
5 Maria: == [laugh] ==
6 Teacher: == indicate right off the bat that it should be .. an r rated video, okay/
7 how 'bout some of the rest == of you?
8 ?: == (all last == summer)
9 Maria: == {[f] uh uh} .. i i just seen like a pray{[laugh]er}/
10 Teacher: == okay like *a prayer alright, {[hi] *good}/
11 what-, do you know what the rating would be{[p] on that one}?

In this exchange, we see a series of initiations in the form of teacher questions, student replies, and teacher evaluations of those replies—these evaluations often signalled by the

word "okay." Throughout the semester we noticed that "okay" was June's most frequent evaluation token—whether or not a student's response was acceptable—but early on we learned to differentiate positive "okays" from negative ones by means of intonation patterns. Here the first "okay" was pronounced with a slight falling intonation—a signal that the student's response had been appropriate. (Contrast this positive or at least neutral intonation pattern with the negative one for "okay" found below in line 5 of Figure 3.) Also apparent from the second, analyzed version of the transcript, but not from the first, is that there is a fair amount of simultaneous talk going on. Note that Maria overlaps her teacher's talk with a laugh in line 5 and then again in line 9, but more loudly the second time, as she attempts to gain the floor. Paying attention to these kinds of contextualization cues helped us more confidently understand and interpret the dynamics of talk and interaction that characterized this particular lesson.

The majority of the conversational turns which occurred in this lesson—some 52 percent—followed the IRE pattern. There were portions of the class time, however, which did not strictly fit this pattern—such as teacher lectures, student initiations, and teacher responses to student initiations. One particularly salient participant structure we call the "mini-lecture." Teacher evaluations often led into these pieces of extended discourse, which served either to elaborate on information already provided or discussed or to introduce new material. A noticeable feature of mini-lectures was that during them June did not acknowledge interruptions or entertain questions. Students who attempted to interrupt were not given the floor. Of the six attempts to interrupt her lectures during this particular class, June gave only one of these any attention, and that one just enough to work the topic into the mini-lecture.

The predominance of IRE sequences and mini-lectures suggests a discourse that is very much teacher-led. And, in fact, of all the exchanges that occurred during this lesson, 83 percent were directed by June. Two of the twelve students in the class, Andrea and Maria, made the majority of student initiations and responses—nineteen percent and sixteen percent respectively—and also the majority of student responses to teacher initiations—24 percent and 20.5 percent. For the most part, the rest of the class sat quietly—at times they whispered or laughed to each other—but they answered few of June's questions, and they asked fewer questions still. In other words, they adhered to the participant structures that normally characterized interaction in this classroom.

Except, that is, for Maria. We now want to look closely at the talk of one student whose discourse patterns stood out, who did not always abide by the tacit rules that governed talk in this classroom. In fact, she often and obviously pressed at the boundaries of what was permissible conversationally. Of Spanish and Italian descent, Maria was born in El Salvador and moved to the United States with her parents when she was almost two years old. Although all her schooling had taken place in the United States, her first language was Spanish, and through a bilingual program in elementary school she had learned to read and write in Spanish before she learned English. Maria told us that her parents don't speak English very well today, although they have been in the United States since 1971, and Spanish continues to be the language of their home, except between Maria and her thirteen-year-old sister.

What Maria told us about her experiences in school prior to college suggests that there she had been a successful student, particularly in English and foreign language classes. She claimed to enjoy writing and said that she had written a romance novel in high school. Her worst subject in high school, she reported, was math, in which she improved from a C to a B (suggesting that she was at least a B student in her other subjects). Maria told us that she had traveled with her high school speech team and had won a $1000

scholarship to college. As a college freshman she still enjoyed writing, especially short stories, and she also kept a journal regularly, writing in it about once a week.

Maria sat in the front row of her remedial writing class. She attended every class and turned in all of her homework on time. She also chose to get tutoring when it was offered. In many respects, then—her scholastic history, her engagement in the course, her goals for the future—she seemed very much the dutiful student, dedicated to schooling and willing to work hard. But as we will illustrate with examples of talk from this lesson, her rules for classroom discourse did not map well onto the norm for this class, particularly her strategies for gaining the floor. And this mismatch, this small but noticeable discontinuity, was to work to her disadvantage.

The difficulty was with turn-taking. In ordinary conversation, the potential exists for the speaker to change after every speaker's turn. That is, once a person has concluded her turn, unless she designates the next speaker, then anyone can take a turn (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974). There are differences, of course, in conversational style: "high involvement" speakers tend to take more turns, talk more, and overlap their speech more than other speakers (Tannen, 1984). Generally, though, in an ordinary conversation, a speaker has the opportunity to talk after the current speaker finishes. But this state of affairs does not, as we illustrated above, exist in certain kinds of classroom conversations. When a teacher initiates, he takes the floor, his students reply, and then the teacher takes the floor back as he evaluates the reply. This IRE structure, this set of interactions, constitutes an integral unit. The appropriate time for students to gain access to the floor is after an IRE sequence. It's not appropriate in an IRE classroom for students to speak after any speaker's turn except the teacher's initiation, and certainly not during a turn. But this is what Maria does.

Maria not only speaks before an IRE sequence has been completed, interjecting between an initiation and a directed response, she also, on occasion, interrupts during a mini-lecture—an extended piece of teacher discourse which is supposedly non-interruptable—with an "Ohhh!" or "Huh Hmmm!" loud enough to be picked up by the audio recorder. Here is an example of such an interruption. Following a lively discussion of a potential rating system for music videos, the teacher begins an explanation of the writing assignment:

Transcript #2

Teacher: Yeah, all right. Very frightening, traumatic, (kind of) blood and gore. [Laughter from the class.] Okay, yeah. All right, yeah. And they, yeah, there's a problem with the accessibility of music videos on television right now, and that's really what we're going to be dealing with in this essay, is the issue of music videos that is being considered right now, and you're going to have a chance to …

Maria: Oh.

Teacher: … try to convince your audience of your position. Okay?

Now let's look at the same excerpt marked for patterns of pause, stress, and tempo. You'll recall that slash marks signal falling intonation, double equal signs signal overlapping speech, asterisks mean emphasis, and [f] means louder speech while [p] means quieter speech. All capitals indicate even greater emphasis.

Figure 2: Transcript #2 with Contextualization Cues Marked

13 Teacher: ==[[f] yeah all right] ==[[class laughter]
very frightening, traumatic, (kind of) blood and gore, okay, yeah]/
14 all right, yeah/
15 and they, yeah, [[f] there's there's a pro*blem] with the accessibility of music
videos on television right now,
16 and THAT'S really what we're going to be dealing with in this in this essay is the
issue of music videos that is being con*sidered right now
17 ~AND *you're going to have a chance to-
18 Maria: ==[[f] oh]-
19 Teacher: ==try to convince your audience of
YOUR position// [[p] 'kay?]

We can see from the emphasis that June puts on "that's," which refers to the accessibility of music videos, that she is signalling an important shift in the classroom lesson. In fact, this kind of intonation pattern was one June used generally to signal topic changes (see below, for other examples, lines 30 and 32 in Figure 3 and line 8 in Figure 4). It is clear that June intends this explanation of a new writing assignment to be free from interruptions: she completes the sentence she had begun as if Maria had not spoken. While Maria's "Oh" is not a lengthy interruption, it is a loud one, and we can also note that she is the only student to interrupt mini-lectures during this lesson.

In addition to interrupting the IRE sequence inappropriately, Maria sometimes pursued topics for a longer time than June seemed to prefer, continuing to initiate statements about a topic after June was ready to move on. In fact, in the example above, when Maria interrupts the beginning of the mini-lecture with her "Oh," she seems to do so because she is still pursuing a topic that she had initiated moments earlier. Here is the larger context for that interruption, several turns both preceding and following it:

Transcript #3

Teacher: Any other music videos that you feel should have been rated in some way or another? [6 second pause]

Maria: How about those scary ones like, um, *Thriller*?

Teacher: Okay. All right. How could-, well, how could you rate those?

Maria: Uh, R. But they're, the, the, they're very, very—I don't like them 'cause they're very scary.

Teacher: Okay.

Andrea: That's why we should create another rating between R and X, 'cause it would-

Maria: No, because it's not only about, um, sex, about that, but it's those, those, those traumatic-

Teacher: Okay.

Maria: You hear about blood and-[Laugh]

Teacher: Yeah, all right. Very frightening, traumatic, (kind of blood and gore. [Laughter from the class.] Okay, yeah. All right, yeah. And they, yeah, there's a problem with the accessibility of music videos on television right now, and that's really what we're going to be dealing with in this essay, is the issue of music videos that is being considered right now, and you're going to have a chance to ...

Maria: Oh.

Teacher: ... try to convince your audience of your position. Okay?

Maria: When I saw the first part of *Thriller* and that, that part when the first part about that corpse?

Teacher: Mmhmm.

Maria: And, and, he jumped up with blood and that was, I, I haven't seen a scene like that in a video before. (It was) scary. Very scary!

[Laughter]

Teacher: Yeah, I can tell just from the publicity which videos I'm gonna avoid just because of those kinds of scenes. So, okay. Wh-, tell me a little about whether you think music videos that you have seen should be allowed on T.V. What kinds of things .. um .. should determine whether they can be on T.V.?

Andrea: Language.

Teacher: Okay, language ...

The contextualization cues at the opening of the transcript suggest that something may be amiss conversationally right from the start. In Figure 3, note the overlap between June's and Maria's speech in lines 2, 3, and 4, and the fluctuating intonation of June's "okay" and "all right" in line 5, the latter indicating that, in this teacher's repertoire, these are not affirmative responses.

Figure 3: Transcript #3 with Contextualization Cues Marked

1 Teacher: {[f] any other music videos that you felt should .. be rated, that should have been rated in some way or another?
<6>
2 Maria: ==how about==those scary ones-
3 Teacher: ==(xxx)==
4 Maria: ==like um, .hriller?
5 Teacher: ok~ay, all r~ight/ {[hi] how could, well how could you rate those?}
6 Maria: uh, r/
7 but they're the the they're very very-, i don't like them 'cause they're very scary/
8 Teacher: okay
9 Andrea: ==that's why we should create another rating between r and x 'cause it would-
10 Maria: ==no because it's-it's not only about, um, sex, [[ac] about that but it's those those those those} trau*matic==(xx)==
11 Teacher: ==okay==

12 Maria: ==you hear==about blood [laugh]==
13 Teacher: ==[[f] yeah all right] ==[[class laughter] very frightening, traumatic, (kind of) blood and gore, okay, yeah]/
14 all right, yeah/
15 and they, yeah, [[f] there's there's a pro*blem] with the accessibility of music videos on television right now,
16 and THAT'S really what we're going to be dealing with in this in this essay is the issue of music videos that is being con*sidered right now,
17 ~AND *you're going to have a chance to-
18 Maria: ==[[f] oh]-
19 Teacher: ==try to convince your audience of YOUR position// [[p] 'kay?]
20 Maria: when i saw the first part of thriller and that that part when-, the *first part about that corpse-
21 Teacher: mm hmm-
22 Maria: [[ac] he jumped up with blood and that was]-
23 I haven't seen a scene like that in a video before/
24 (it was) scary/
25 Teacher: yeah-
26 Maria: ==very scary/[laugh]
27 Teacher: yeah/ [[f] i can tell just from the publicity==
28 Class: ==[laughter from many]==
29 Teacher: ==(which videos) i'm gonna avoid just because of those kinds of scenes, so [clears throat],
30 OKAY//
31 Class: [mumbling and laughter from students]
32 Teacher: wh-, TELL me a little bit about *whether you think .. the music videos that you have seen, should be *allowed [p] on t.v.]/
33 what kinds of things .. um, should determine whether they can be on t.v./
34 Andrea: ==language//
35 Teacher: okay, language/ [writes on board]

We can see from this extended portion of classroom talk in Transcript #3 that Maria interrupts the mini-lecture apparently to continue talking about a topic that she had brought up just moments earlier—the frightening violence in the video *Thriller*—but that June had discouraged. In fact, Maria pursues this topic quite persistently: she ignores June's question in line 5 about how such videos should be rated to comment further on their frightfulness in line 7; she heads off Andrea's comment about a new rating proposal in line 9 to argue for the salience of trauma over sex in line 10; and she interrupts June's mini-lecture which starts in line 16 to describe a particularly scary incident from *Thriller* in line 20. We can see June responding to Maria's initiations with brief or disapproving responses (see especially lines 5, 27, 29) and finally taking hold of the discourse once again.

We think June's response in this instance is understandable: Maria appears to be reintroducing a topic that had been completed; June had shifted from discussion of specific videos to the essay question of whether or not music videos should be regulated. It is interesting to note, though, that the question June asks to bring the discourse round again to the essay topic—what kinds of things should determine whether a video could be aired on television?—was answered implicitly by Maria in her discussion of the violence in *Thriller*, but her contribution wasn't explicitly acknowledged.

In fact, June didn't appear to value what seemed to us appropriate responses from Maria, even when those responses did fit the pattern of classroom talk. Toward the end of

Figure 3 (line 32), June asked what might determine how a movie video would be rated. In response to her question, students suggested "language," "sex," and "violence," and there were brief discussions of each in turn. June then asked the question again, for the fourth time, and when there was no response for several seconds, she explained that nudity might be another factor and explained how nudity is not to be confused with sexual scenes. Then, again, she asks the "what else" question; there's a long pause, and Maria replies:

Transcript #4

Teacher: Okay, Can you think of anything else that might, they might consider when they're trying to decide how to rate a music video? (pause)

Maria: Um, is it like .. ( ) .. something to do with somebody that criticizes somebody else, like political issues, something like that?

Teacher: Um, I don't know, um, that-

Maria: Seems like, um, yeah-

Teacher: That's not a widely recognized one but it might be one that is sort of subtle that's-

Maria: Yeah. Like talking about like if you ( ) somebody, like race or something like that, ( ) video ( ) something like that.

Teacher: Um, I don't know. Um, who would that kind of a video appeal to?

Maria: Um, I don't know, um.

Teacher: Would that appeal to children?

Matt: What music video is this?

Teacher: If, a music video about some kind of a political issue.

Maria: Yeah.

Matt: Oh, you mean like *Graceland* or something by U2?

Teacher: Yeah, something like that. Now is that the kind of video that would really appeal to children?

Andrea: No.

Teacher: Or who would that appeal to?

In the following analysis of the transcript, notice that after line 1, there is a long pause—one that perhaps gives Maria and the rest of the class enough time to provide thoughtful responses. It's also noteworthy that in line 2 we see some indications—from her pauses, soft voice, and tentative questions—that Maria is struggling to articulate a partly-formed idea. Notice, though, that in line 6 Maria takes on steam as she thinks of race as a possible example and speeds up her talk.

Figure 4: Transcript #4 with Contextualization Cues Marked

1 Teacher: ... okay, {[hi] can you think of anything else that might}-, they might consider when they're trying to decide how to rate a music video? <5>
2 Maria: Uhhm, is it like <4> {[p] ( ) uh <3> something to do with .. somebody that criticizes somebody else, like .. political issues? something like that?
3 Teacher: uh [sigh] <2.5> i don't know/ um==that-
4 Maria: ==seems like um, yeah-
5 Teacher: ==[[f] that's not a widely recog]nized one but .. it might be one that is sort of subtle that's-
6 Maria: y~eah like {[ac] [p] talking about like if you ( ) somebody, like race or something like that ( ) video ( ) something like that}
7 Teacher: {[p] mm hmm/} uhhm, {[hi] i don't know}/
8 um, WHO would that kind of video appeal to?
9 Maria: um, i don't know/ um,
10 Teacher: would that appeal to children?
11 Matt: what music video is this?
12 Teacher: if-, a video about some kind of political issue//
13 Maria: yeah/
14 Matt: oh you mean like uh Graceland or something by U2?
15 Teacher:{[hi] yeah something like that}/
16 now, is that the kind of video that would really appeal to children?
17 Andrea: ==no/
18 Teacher: ==or who would that appeal to?

In this exchange, it seems to us that Maria brings up a new way to think about what influences ratings: a video with political overtones certainly could arouse concern or anger. Maria's comment, then, could have been an occasion for a discussion of censorship. For such a discussion to happen, however, June would need to provide some assistance, some verbal scaffolding, for Maria is struggling to express a partly formed idea about the importance of political contexts for music videos. But June does not assist this potential contribution; in fact, she disallows Maria's answer by undercutting it. (Notice June's use of "I don't know" in the evaluation slot in contrast to her usual, more ostensibly neutral, "Okay.") June shifts the discussion away from political censorship and toward the issue of age by asking an unexpected question: "Who would that kind of a video appeal to?" (In line 8 this shift is signalled by June's intonation, a specific use of a contextualization cue that we observed at other places in the lesson.) This question departs from the pattern she had earlier established—the repeated question of "what else" might determine how a video gets rated—and it has a silencing effect on Maria. The conversation gets short-circuited, and Maria's moment for contributing a piece of knowledge is lost, and so is an opportunity for the class to consider an important issue.

Soon after the lesson June viewed the videotape we had made of it, and she commented on Maria's classroom talk:

Teacher: Mari', Maria is becoming to me the queen of the non sequiturs. You know, she really is just not quite ...

Interviewer: Mmhmm, she ...

Teacher: That's, that's why I'm sort of amazed at times at, at her writing level, which is not really too bad.

Interviewer: Mmhmm.

Teacher: Because her thinking level seems to be so scattered that I would expect that her writing would be a lot more disorganized and disjointed.

June was amazed at the level of Maria's writing, which was "not really too bad," given the scattered cognition June surmised from Maria's oral performance in class. In fact, June actually awarded Maria's written logic and organization with steadily improving grades and positive comments on her essays: "I like the way you made distinctions between facts and opinions." "You are very thorough and your thinking about the advice is very clear and logical." But, in spite of such evidence, the teacher seemed to be greatly influenced in her assessment of Maria's abilities by her talk in the classroom, using "talking" as a barometer for "thinking," labelling Maria the "Queen of the Non Sequiturs." At the end of the semester, when summing up her evaluations of students, June confided that Maria "was a sweet girl, but she drove me crazy." She accounted for the improvement Maria had made in her writing by surmising that she had probably gotten help from her parents. (This was unlikely, however, since Maria's parents spoke little English.) June then made a final comment about her thinking: "Maria has thinking continuity problems." She predicted Maria wouldn't pass the next writing class the first time through "because it requires coherent thinking."

We think we can outline the process by which June constructed her view of Maria. When we looked over our field notes and our videotapes, there was abundant evidence that Maria did violate some of this classroom's rules for talk. Over the course of the semester, Maria made 28 statements that were recorded in our fieldnotes. Ten of these were responses that fit the IRE question/answer structure; the remaining eighteen were initiations in the form of questions, and of these questions, six were procedural—how long does our essay have to be? must we type or can we write by hand? what page did you say the exercises are on?—a type of question that may be bothersome, particularly if its timing is a little off and it occurs after the conversation has turned to other matters. And, in fact, June did notice Maria's questioning patterns, and commented at the end of the semester that Maria asked a lot of questions in class but didn't answer many that June had posed to her.

Maria did, then, seem to initiate more than she responded—asking questions, taking the floor, diverting the course of classroom talk—and hers was not exactly the expected posture for a student in an IRE classroom. There were times when her interjections did suggest that she was not paying attention or was involved in something else related to the class, like reading over the assignment sheet while June was talking. This, we would argue, led to June's construction of Maria as the "queen of the non-sequiturs," the student who could be trusted to make a comment that was inappropriate or off-target. Given the way Maria's conversational habits stood out, it seems likely that June's view of Maria as an inappropriate talker would eventually become salient enough to affect her perception of Maria even when she interjects in a way that is appropriate. Join this perception of a particular student with this teacher's strong predilection for an IRE participant structure, and you won't be surprised that Maria's chances to be heard would be undercut. The cycle continues as Maria's interactional patterns in class become, not just an annoying conversational style, but the barometer by which to measure her cognitive abilities. Her bothersome conversational habits become evidence of a thinking problem—evidence that is so salient that it goes unqualified even in the face of counter-evidence that Maria, in fact, wrote rather well.

But though we can explain at least some of the steps in the construction of Maria as a scattered thinker, we are left with a troubling question: How is it that annoying conversational style can become a measure of intellectual ability? What we have seen here

is a relatively minor disjunction between teacher expectation and student behavior, an irritating mismatch of styles that, perhaps, chafes at June's sense of authority. But given that irritations with students can lead to a range of outcomes, what made June's judgment of cognitive deficiency possible? To answer this question, we believe we need to consider the broader educational and cultural context in which June lives—the received language and frames of mind she works within. Put another way, we need to consider the ways our schools have historically judged mental ability from performance that is somehow problematic and the sanctioned paths of inference from behavior to cognition that emerge from such judgments. We will begin by describing what we think of as this larger context for remedial writing instruction with a brief history of "low achievers" in American education.

II. THE CULTURAL CONTEXT OF SCHOOL FAILURE

There is a long, troubling history in American education of perceiving and treating low-achieving children as if they were lesser in character and fundamental ability. Larry Cuban and David Tyack (1988), citing work by Stanley Zehm (1973), trace this history by examining the labels that have been attached to students who are low-achievers for "contained in a name, either explicitly or implicitly, is both an explanation and a prescription" (p. 4). In the first half of the nineteenth century, the poor performer was a "dunce," "shirker," "loafer," "reprobate," or "wrong-doer" who was "stupid," "vicious," "depraved," "wayward," or "incorrigible." Some of these labels imply that students lacked intelligence, but the majority suggest a flawed character. Such assessments, note Cuban and Tyack, reveal "a set of religious and moral convictions that placed responsibility for behavior and achievement in the sovereign individual" (p. 4). During the last half of the nineteenth century, the labels shifted somewhat toward intelligence rather than character, though with a developmental or organic cast: students were "born late," "sleepy-minded," "overgrown," "immature," "slow," or "dull." "The condemnatory, religious language used earlier was diminishing," note Cuban and Tyack, "but the notion that academic failure came from defects of character or disposition continued" (p. 4). As we move into the twentieth century, notions of developmental and intellectual normalcy—evident in the abnormalcy of labels like "born late" and "sleepy minded"—continued to evolve and were applied, in a negative way, to poor performers. And with the advent of the I.Q. movement, the assessment of intelligence, as Stephen Jay Gould (1981) has observed, was pseudo-scientifically reified into a unitary measure of cognitive—and human—worth. Class and race prejudice, xenophobia, the social engineering of Social Darwinists and Eugenicists absorbed the new technology of mental measurement, and the deficiency of those who performed poorly in school could, it was said, be precisely and scientifically assessed.

Though the ways of thinking about thinking generated by the I.Q. movement are still very much with us, we have changed perspectives somewhat since the heyday of the Eugenicists. The social reform movements of the 50s and 60s shifted the discussion of school failure from the character and ability of the individual toward the society that produces "alienated" and "socially maladjusted" youth and, as well, toward the economic conditions that have a negative impact on a lower-class child's readiness for school. Yet such social theories often reflected the influence of the theories that preceded them. Cuban and Tyack point out that along with the sociologically oriented analyses of the 50s—with their discussions of "social maladjustment" and "dropping out"—came designations of students as "immature learners," "unwilling learners," and "dullards." And many of the economic analyses of the 60s discussed minority and working class culture in terms of deficit and pathology. A number of linguistic, psychological, and social psychological studies—focused, to a great extent, on African Americans—were designed and interpreted in such a way as to demonstrate impoverishment of language, maladaptive mother-child interaction, inadequate environmental stimuli for the development of cognition, and so on.

(See Mitchell, 1982, for a good overview.) Education tried to move beyond the moralistic, characterologic, deficit orientation of a previous era only to enshrine such orientations in a seemingly reform-minded social science research—and to continue to fault children for educational failure.

Through the seventies and eighties, two other perspectives on school failure have emerged: the effect cultural differences can have on communication and learning in the classroom (see, e.g., Au, 1980; Heath, 1983; Philips, 1983) and the effect class- and race-based resistance to socialization into the mainstream can have on school performance (see, e.g., Chase, 1988; Everhart, 1983; Giroux, 1983; Ogbu & Matute-Bianchi, 1986; Willis, 1977). We see these perspectives as powerful advances and—like many researchers of our generation—have been deeply influenced by them. But what concerns us is the ease with which older deficit-oriented explanations for failure can exist side-by-side with these newer theories, and, for that fact, can narrow the way such theories are represented and applied, turning differences into deficits, reducing the rich variability of human thought, language, and motive (Rose, 1985b; 1988).

We think here of another teacher at another school in our study—a very good teacher, respected by colleagues and warmly regarded by students—who, upon receiving an assignment to teach his institution's most "remedial" course, dutifully sought out the program's expert in applied linguistics and schooling. The expert told the teacher, among other things, about research on differences in socialization for schooling. Our teacher later told a colleague that he was "in despair," fearful that "I may not be able to help these kids." Given their early socialization patterns "they barely have a chance. They're doomed by the time they enter school." There may be a harsh truth in the teacher's despair—poor kids do fail in disproportionate numbers—but note how variability disappears as rich differences in background and style become reduced to a success-failure binary and the "problem"—as has been the tendency in our history—shifts from the complex intersection of cognition and culture and continues to be interpreted as a deficiency located within families and students. In this perspective, school performance, as Ronald Edmonds (1979) once put it, "derives from family background instead of school response to family background" (p. 23).

It is difficult to demonstrate causal relationships across the level of individual functioning and the levels of social, cultural and historical contexts, what Erickson (1982) calls "system levels" or "levels of organization" (pp. 166-167). It is difficult to demonstrate, in our case, that pervasive, shared assumptions about ability and remediation influenced a teacher's interaction with and assessment of a student. One way to gain some reasonable evidence of influence, however, is to look closely at the language the teacher uses, and we have done that. Another way is to find institutional mechanisms that might serve to instantiate influential cultural assumptions. One such mechanism seemed to be the college's training program in which this teacher participated. In such programs, readings on topics like the composing process, the social context of schooling, and error analysis are sometimes combined, we have observed, with skills-and-drills materials and deficit-oriented theories and assessments. From what we could tell from June's discussion of the program with us, this mix seemed to obtain. In addressing it, we can treat more fully a point we made earlier: the lasting power of deficit notions in our society and the way they can blend with and subvert more forward-looking notions about language and cognition. This blend is evident in two excerpts from June's commentary on the videotape of the present lesson and a previous one.

In the first, June and the interviewer have been talking about the difficulty her students have with academic writing, particularly papers requiring categorization and comparison:

Teacher: They don't have those skills. Many of them don't. And many don't have an attention to detail that's necessary for some kinds of things; for instance, for classification, uh, exercises there's a need to look at, at specifics and at detail at times in order to be thorough, you know, to deal with that. They just don't have the practice in doing that. Uh, I think what I'm trying to do is, um, make sure that I tie as much as I possibly can into their own experience. Um, because many of these students don't have a lot to bring with them in terms of academic experience, but they do have some life experience to bring with them so ...

Interviewer: Okay.

Teacher: So, for instance, what I did in class about, um, having them write about what they think the educational system should do. Uh, ideally I would have liked them to do that before they ever read the article on, uh, Wednesday, just to get them thinking about what they're, what they already know about it, what, you know, what experience has already shown them about the things or what they've heard somewhere.... A lot of these kids have problems with connections between things. They, they don't see the connection between what goes on in their lives and what happens in the classroom, what happens, uh, at home....

June notes, accurately we think, that many of her students haven't had sufficient practice in writing academic papers in which they must classify phenomena and attend closely to detail. She then observes that while her students may not have had a certain kind of privileged education, they certainly do have life experience and a history of schooling—both of which can be tapped and reflected upon, activating background knowledge that can help them with college assignments. But then look at the interesting thing that happens—a move that we witnessed in a number of our studies—the leap is made from an accurate description of particular difficulties (students have trouble writing certain kinds of papers) to a judgment about a general cognitive capacity: "A lot of these kids have problems with connections between things." Note, as well, the acknowledgment of a problem with the educational system—the segmentation of home and school knowledge—but the locating of it within the individual's cognition ("They don't see the connection") rather than within the system.

Now to the second excerpt:

Interviewer: Maria said something real interesting today. I asked them ... to tell me what they think good writing or good reading is, and ... she just immediately said "Good writing is creative writing."

Teacher: She's written a novel—incredible!

Interviewer: Yes, she told me that (both laugh).

Teacher: She's written about it in her journal and I, I, you know I thought that was neat ...

Interviewer: You know I asked her ... if she tried to apply creativity in her writing and she said, "Oh, yes!"

Teacher: Well, she doesn't ... (laughs) She doesn't understand the difference between creative writing and expository prose.

Interviewer: I'm not sure.

Teacher: Yet.

Interviewer: I'm not sure.

Teacher: Well, that's not really something they get until, um, English 20A anyway. We don't really start talking about those distinctions until then ...

June wants to "tie as much as [she] possibly can into [her students'] own experience"; she also thinks it's a good thing that Maria wrote about her novel in her journal. But almost in the same breath she devalues Maria's extra-institutional literary activity and negates the possibility that she could learn things about literacy from it. The closing remark about English 20A is telling, we think, for with it June suggests that it is only through a lockstepped, carefully segmented curriculum that students like Maria can eventually develop the ability to understand the characteristics of different literacies and make distinctions between them. Perhaps because this teacher views fundamental cognitive abilities as deficient—thinking continuity problems, problems seeing connections—she suggests that it is only through the remedial therapy of a series of self-contained, carefully sequenced treatments that literacy knowledge can be developed. In a different guise, this is a skills-and-drills philosophy in which instructional scaffolding is replaced by curricular prostheses.

The point we want to make is that June is not alone in her judgments. For almost two centuries the dominant way to think about underachieving students has been to focus on defects in intellect or character or differences in culture or situation that lead to failure, and to locate the causes within the mind and language of the individual.[5] We are primed by this history, by our backgrounds and our educations to speak of students as deficient,[6,7] even as we attempt to devise curricula we call forward-looking, and this is true despite the great awakening that has occurred since the publication of Shaughnessy's *Errors and Expectations* in 1977. To be sure, we have found ways to understand our students' writing and promote its development, even when that writing differs markedly from the academic standard; we have come to see our courses as entry points to the academy, safe ground where students who have not had sufficient experience with academic reading and writing can make up for lost time, and do so without censure. Often, however, these new understandings come mixed with deeply held, unarticulated assumptions about remediation and remedial students, deficit assumptions that have been part of educational thought for a

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[5]For another account of this history, see Robert Sinclair and Ward Ghory's *Reaching Marginal Students* (1987).

[6]British researchers Michael Golby and John R. Gulliver (1985) make a related point in their critical review of remedial education in England and Wales: "In order to understand what exists, we must see remedial education firstly in its historical context, and secondly as a manifestation of ideologies obtaining not only within education but also having co-relative applications within wider social policy" (p. 11). See also Michael Cole and Peg Griffin (1986).

[7]For a related argument, see Sandra Schecter and Tamara Lucas's position paper on "Literacy Education and Diversity" (1989).

long time. Our unexamined cultural biases about difference, our national habits of mind for sorting and labelling individuals who perform poorly, our legacy of racism and class bias—these are the frames of mind which make it possible, even unremarkable, to assume that talk that is occasionally non-synchronous with the talk in a classroom indicates some fundamental problem in thought, to assume "thinking continuity problems" from a difference in conversational style. In examining June's ways of assessing cognition, then, we hope to set the foundation for ongoing self-examination, for we are all enmeshed in culture, and, even as we resist them, we are shaped by its forces.

III. EXAMINING ASSUMPTIONS

How can we as teachers and researchers examine our assumptions about remediation and remedial writing and remedial students? How can we be alert to deficit explanations for the difficulties that students experience in our classrooms? We have four suggestions.

1. Remembering teacher development

When basic writing was just emerging as a course worth a teacher's serious attention and commitment, Mina Shaughnessy pointed out that most work was focussing on what was wrong with students rather than with teacher development. The effect of this tendency was the erroneous notion "that students, not teachers, are the people in education who must do the changing" (1976, p. 234). Shaughnessy reminded us that students aren't the only people in a classroom who develop and grow, and she proposed a kind of impressionistic developmental scale for teachers of basic writing, each stage of which she named with a common metaphor: "Guarding the Tower," "Converting the Natives," "Sounding the Depths," and "Diving In." The significant thing to us about these metaphors is that they focus on teachers' attitudes about students' abilities. A teacher who guards the tower is so stunned by fractured writing that she believes the students who produced it have no place in the academy, for they will never be able to live up to the ideal of academic prose. Once this shock abates, and a teacher begins to believe that his students are educable, he proceeds with conversion by offering them a steady flow of "truth" without thinking too much about the skills and habits students bring with them, often unconsciously, to their interactions with texts. The third stage involves the recognition that the writing behavior these students display has a logic that merits careful observation. At this point, then, a teacher is moving away from deficit notions and towards an appreciation of students' abilities. The last stage takes place when a teacher is willing to "remediate himself, to become a student of new disciplines and of his students themselves in order to perceive both their difficulties and their incipient excellence" (p. 239). It is not at all easy, cautioned Shaughnessy, for a college teacher to assume that the students in his class, already labelled remedial, possess this incipient excellence.

We want to argue that the situation Shaughnessy described is still with us. Granted, we have made much progress in learning about the writing process, in conducting interdisciplinary research, in imagining liberatory pedagogies, even in establishing composition programs which include some kind of training for teachers.[8] But what we have been much less successful in doing is promoting teacher development of the sort Shaughnessy described. We have assumed, as a best case scenario, that if new teachers are introduced to writing theory and research as a part of their graduate training, and if they have the chance to prepare and develop curricular materials for their classes (conditions that

[8]A special issue of the *Journal of Basic Writing* (1981) was devoted to discussions of the kinds of programs that would best prepare basic writing teachers.

are all too rare), then they will necessarily acquire whatever it is they need to know about remedial students. Maybe we have also assumed that teachers automatically move from "guarding the tower" to "diving in" just as a function of experience. Our studies make us question these assumptions. Because deficit notions of abilities are so deeply ingrained in most of us, it seems very unlikely that most teachers, pressed as they are by constraints of time and curricula, will discover serendipitously more productive ways to view students' abilities.

And how we view students' abilities, we have tried to illustrate in this paper, can have profound effects. A great deal of research has shown that students whose teachers expect them to do well, tend to do well, while students whose teachers expect them to do poorly, do poorly. These findings hold firm, even in cases of mistaken placement or misinformation. That is, "bright" students who are mistakenly expected to perform poorly in the classroom will often do poorly, while students labelled "average" will often excel if their teacher believes that this is what they are supposed to do (Brophy, 1983). We have illustrated that Maria's discourse style did not fit well with the IRE participant structure of her remedial writing class. It also occurred to us that Maria's conversational patterns more closely resemble the talk that is allowed in classrooms geared to the honors student. Perhaps Maria, who placed in non-remedial classes in high school and was on the speech team, was accustomed to speaking up with her own opinion, which she expected to be acknowledged by her teachers and to be of some import to the lesson. She displays an eagerness to be involved, to interact with her teacher.[9] By the end of the semester the mismatch between Maria's discourse style and that of the classroom seemed to be taking a toll. Maria told us in her last tutoring session that she now "had some problems with ... English," that her writing had gotten "longer" but not necessarily better, and that she was "not a very good speaker." Perhaps it is also noteworthy that she expressed interest at the end of the semester in teaching students who were poor performers in the classroom. In any case, her negative self-assessments are very different from the successful Maria we saw at the beginning of the semester—the student who loved writing and who'd been a member of the speech team—and suggest that she had perhaps begun to internalize her teacher's opinions of her abilities.

Research on expectancy theory thus supports Shaughnessy's claims about teacher development: the beliefs we construct of our students' abilities can influence their lives in our classrooms and beyond in profound ways. We want to suggest that it would be unwise just to rely on process pedagogy and experience in the classroom to foster the development of non-deficit attitudes among teachers and teacher-trainees. We need to spend some time thinking about teacher development—not just what knowledge to impart about writing, but how to develop the ability to question received assumptions about abilities and performance, how to examine the thinking behind the curricula we develop and the assessments we make.[10]

We might, for a start, look closely at writing instruction to identify moments when teachers transcend deficit attitudes, when teaching serves to invite rather than to deny. Roger Simon (1983) has written about "the contradictory character of the work of teaching" (p. 246), illustrating that "what teachers choose to signify at any particular moment in time

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[9]This explanation of Maria's interactional patterns is developed more fully by Kay Losey Fraser in a paper delivered at the 1989 Conference on College Composition and Communication.

[10]To this end, with our colleague Cynthia Greenleaf, we are creating a set of cases and an interpretation of remedial education in the U.S. that we hope can be used to engage teachers in the kind of inquiry that leads one to trace the connections between the mind of the student and the classroom and the community beyond.

may present meanings which are ideologically inconsistent with meanings present at other times" (248). He locates the origin of these contradictions, not in the individual, but in the larger social and institutional context, and he sees contradictory moments as potentially liberatory, for they make possible the inclusion of oppositional knowledge in educational practice. In a related way, we might think of teaching as an ongoing flow of moments of invitation and moments of denial. The better, the more effective the teaching, the richer and more frequent the moments of invitation, encouragement, and assistance (though no extended period of teaching will be free of constraint, limit, even rejection). What has interested us in this paper is the way in which culturally sanctioned, deficit-oriented assumptions about learning and cognition can tip the scale. But what we need to do as well is identify, understand, and learn to foster those moments in which teachers encourage rather than restrict their student's potential.

2. Attending to classroom discourse

One of the things we have learned in doing this paper is the value of looking closely at the talk that transpires in classrooms. We have been interested particularly in conversational patterns—rules for turn-taking and the special participant structure that characterizes so much of talk in school, the IRE sequence. But this work on turn-taking, interesting and revealing though it can be, was a means to another end. In the classroom it is through talk that learning gets done, that knowledge gets made. Using conversational turns as a unit of analysis gave us a window on knowledge making.

In the analysis reported in this paper we focused on a moment when Maria didn't get to make knowledge, when her chance to contribute a special piece of information, one that would have deepened the discourse at hand, was denied. We have argued that the reason her contribution was denied had to do with June's construction of her as a particular kind of remedial student, a scattered thinker, and that such a construction likely had its origin in long-standing widespread beliefs about low-achieving students, beliefs that such students are deficient and that the locus of any academic difficulty they have lies within them. In this instance, then, we saw faulty notions about cognition being played out and reinforced within a certain participant structure, the IRE sequence.

This finding raised for us the possibility that the IRE sequence could be the vehicle for a discourse of remediation, a discourse where most questions have "known" answers, where June maintains tight control over conversation, where students are not allowed to participate in free-ranging talk. In the literature on classroom talk, many objections have been raised about the IRE participant structure in terms of the role that more free-ranging talk can play in knowledge construction (see, for example, Applebee, 1981; Barnes, 1976; Cazden, 1988; Dillon, 1988; Edwards & Furlong, 1978; Moffett, 1968; Tharp & Gallimore, 1989). We too see a place for free-ranging, student-led discussion (Hull & Rose, 1990).[11] But we would also suggest that the IRE participant structure does not itself circumvent knowledge-making and engagement; the kinds of questions that teachers ask and the kinds of evaluations that they give to students' responses will more often affect what knowledge gets made and who makes it. Questions that are genuine questions, that don't have pre-specified answers, and evaluations that validate students' contributions are

[11]We aren't, however, offering student-led discussion, collaborative groups, or peer conferencing as a panacea. Thomas Fox (1989) has illustrated that conversation between peers can be dramatically and negatively affected by gender and race relations. See also John Trimbur (1989).

going to create a different kind of classroom discourse and a different level of engagement.[12]

Let us look at some bits of conversation from our classroom lesson which do just that.

Teacher: Well, tell me a little bit about what would go into determining how the music videos that you have seen might be rated. What kinds of things, um, would be used to determine how, what, how a movie gets rated?

Student: Language.

Teacher: Okay, language (writes it on the board). Like what, tell me, give examples. I mean [...] You don't have to swear but ...

In this IRE sequence, June asks a follow-up question, incorporating the student's answer into her next question in order to elicit an elaboration on the student's answer. She considers the student's answer important enough to spend time on it, to work it into the exchange, to allow it to modify the subsequent discussion. And in so doing, she bestows value on it.

Teacher: Or who would that appeal to?

Matt: I don't think that—

Susan: ( ) over 18.

Matt: Children of what age level?

Teacher: Okay, that's a good question: children of what age?

Here June accepts a student's initiation and sanctions it as the topic of the next series of questions. This move shows, again, a willingness to accept students' ideas and to value them.

Teacher: What, what are some of the music videos you've seen recently?

Andrea: *Thriller*.

Teacher: *Thriller*.

Matt: *Graceland*.

Teacher: Okay, *Thriller*, ... and *Graceland*. I'll, I'll come back to that one, but *Thriller*, what's the rating on *Thriller*?

Here June acknowledges that a student's comment, although it cannot immediately be responded to, is nevertheless important and will eventually be discussed.

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[12]Martin Nystrand and Adam Gamoran (1988, 1989) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison are currently engaged in studies of classroom lessons aimed at characterizing high-quality instructional discourse.

And those moments when June was able to shift out of the *IRE* pattern—mixing conversation styles, encouraging other modes of participation—gave rise to yet other opportunities for fruitful talk. For example, when one student proposes that music videos could be rated by a quantitative tally of objectionable language, June responds:

> Teacher: Okay. Now that's something I had not heard before, but that kind of makes sense.

Here, then, is an admission from June that a student knows something that she doesn't—an admission that might lessen the power differential in the classroom and make authentic discourse more possible. Another such moment occurred when a student points out that the same kind of violence that would result in a restrictive rating for a music video regularly occurs as part of on-the-scene reporting in newscasts—an assertion, by the way, that challenged the position June had adopted. The student then goes on to give an example of a murder shown recently on a local television news program:

> Matt: I saw the shooting.
>
> Andrea: Yeah, I've seen the shooting.
>
> Jason: Yeah, ( ) They shot 'im like from, from where I'm at to where you're at ...

Following the above excerpt, the conversation takes off and continues for another two pages in our transcript. June does evaluate a few times during this conversation, but she sees that it is clearly a topic of concern for the students—a number of different students initiate during this discussion—and she lets it go, longer than any other student conversation in the lesson. She also becomes an "equal" participant at times, no longer evaluating but asking questions for which she doesn't have a particular answer in mind. These are not remarkable exchanges, but they were rare in the lessons we analyzed, and they do illustrate a capacity to engage in kinds of classroom conversation other than those we saw with Maria.

We want to recommend that attention be paid to the talk that goes on in our writing classrooms—analyses of the participant structures, whether they be IRE sequences or other patterns of interaction—with an eye for determining the kind of talk those structures allow. We have seen that discourse structures direct talk in particular ways and that certain moves within those structures can instantiate assumptions about cognition and undercut creative thinking and engagement. If we look closely at the talk we allow, we may also get a new sense of our own assumptions about our students' capabilities.

3. Making macro-micro connections

What has frequently happened in the study of reading and writing is that researchers have conducted either fine-grained analyses of texts or of the cognitive processes involved in text comprehension and production *or* have produced studies of wider focus of the social and political contexts of reading, writing, and schooling. Such a separation isn't peculiar to literacy research, but characterizes as well divisions among disciplines. As anthropologist Frederick Erickson (1982) has pointed out, "Individual cognitive functioning has been largely the purview of cognitive psychologists who have often attempted to study thinking apart from the naturally occurring social and cultural circumstances of its use," while "the anthropology of education often has studied *anything but* deliberately taught cognitive learning" (p. 173). Erickson goes on to suggest that "some rapprochement is needed, from the direction of the (more cognitively sophisticated)

psychology of learning to the (more contextually sophisticated) anthropology of learning" (p. 173).

Such calls to systematically integrate social and cognitive perspectives are increasing (Freedman, Dyson, Flower, & Chafe, 1987; Michaels, 1989; Rose, 1985a). Sociologist Aaron Cicourel argues that "the study of discourse and the larger context of social interaction requires explicit references to a broader organizational setting and aspects of cultural beliefs often ignored by students of discourse and conversational analysis" (quoted in Corsaro, 1981, p. 22). At the same time, educational anthropologist Henry Trueba (1988) reminds us, "the strength of ethnographic research [on school achievement] and its contribution to theory building ... will depend on the strength of each of the microanalytical links of the inferential chains that form our macrotheoretical statements" (p. 283). To adequately study language in society, then, one has to take into account "interrelationships among linguistic, cognitive, and sociocultural elements" (Cicourel, p. 23).

Moving between micro-level, close examination of oral or written discourse and macro-level investigations of society and culture—seeking connections between language, cognition, and context—is, we feel, particularly important in the case of students designated remedial and for our efforts to examine our assumptions about these students' abilities (Hull & Rose, 1989). Without the microperspective, one runs the risk of losing sight of the particulars of behavior; without the macroperspective, one runs the risk of missing the social and cultural logic of that behavior. In the case of Maria, micro-level analyses enabled us to examine closely the conversational processes by which a student was defined as a scattered thinker and the ways her opportunities to participate in and contribute to knowledge production were narrowed. Macro-level analyses can encourage a consideration of Maria's discourse processes in contexts other than the individual cognitive one provided by her teacher and, as well, encourage reflection on the very language June uses in making her assessment. So, let us now play out some macro-level considerations of Maria's conversational style.

Reproduction/resistance theorists and cultural difference theorists, both mentioned earlier, would raise questions about the broader political and cultural contexts of Maria's behavior. The former group would wonder if Maria's conversational style was an attempt to resist an educational system that does not serve her well, while the latter group would wonder if Maria's conversational style reflected communication patterns shaped by her cultural inheritance and/or her family background. The focus of the "problem" of Maria's conversational style wouldn't automatically be on the isolated processes of her own cognition, but on the possible role played by other political or cultural influences. A somewhat related perspective would focus on Maria's history in classrooms—wondering what prior socializing experiences in school might have influenced her interactional style. A further perspective would tighten the contextual focus to the immediate psychosocial context of Maria's current instruction. Was there something about the way Maria expressed her need to be involved in the class and her teacher's conscious or unconscious reaction to it that affected Maria's conversational style?

In posing these perspectives, we do not want to suggest that each has equal explanatory power for Maria's case. For example, our data don't seem to support reproduction-resistance theory. Maria was an eager participant in the classroom community, taking part dutifully in virtually every aspect of her course. Her interruptions of classroom talk did not appear to us to be interruptions for the sake of disruption; rather she seemed to want to take part in class, to make a contribution, or to keep track of assignment information she may have missed. (The value of this perspective in Maria's case may be more general, however, in that it can lead one to examine the political context

of schooling and the inequities of class in American educational history.) The applicability of the cultural differences perspective is a more complicated issue. There may well be home-school differences at work in Maria's conversational style; unfortunately we were not able to visit Maria's home or collect information from other sources that could shed light on this hypothesis directly. One could argue, though, against the applicability of the cultural differences hypothesis here in any strong way. While Maria may have operated with different cultural assumptions about communication when she first began elementary school in the United States, it seems unlikely that she would not have become aware of the dominant discourse of schooling, the IRE participant structure, by the time she entered college. Still there is real value, it seems to us, in speculating on the possible conversational dynamics within Maria's family that might influence what she does in the classroom, especially under the pressure to articulate an idea. We have very limited data on the third perspective, offered above—Maria's history of interaction with teachers—though this seems a good possibility to pursue, especially given her participation on a speech team, where somewhat more interactive conversational patterns could have existed. We think the fourth perspective—the psychosocial context of Maria and her teacher—is promising, especially when we consider the less excitable Maria observed in our tutorial sessions.

Our best, and cautious, guess about the context of Maria's conversational style in this classroom, then, would be that three possible influences are at work: a) Maria's previous experience in classrooms or other school contexts that were less teacher-centered, b) characteristics of her non-classroom conversational style, possibly shaped by family dynamics, and c) Maria's eagerness—perhaps tinged with anxiety—to do well and be part of things and the growing number of disapproving cues she picks up from her teacher, which could lead to further uncertainty and anxiety, and with that, further communicative missteps.

Attempting to link micro-level with macro-level analysis—shuttling in a systematic way between close linguistic and cognitive study and studies of broader contexts—can, we think, provide a richer understanding of the history and logic of particular behaviors. It might provide, as well, checks and balances on the assessments we make about ability, and perhaps it can lead us to raise to conscious examination our assumptions about the nature and cause of performance that strikes us as inadequate or unusual. But even as we use this micro-macro metaphor, we are unhappy with it, for we recognize that it still separates cognitive behaviors and social contexts into different domains. In fact, one reason for much recent interest in Vygotsky and the extension of his work called "activity theory" (Wertsch, 1985; Minick, 1989) is that his sociocultural theory of mind provides an alternative to the division of cognition from context, mind from culture, knowing from acting. We see a need to work toward holistic conceptions of the study of schooling and students' performance which take as a given that linguistic and cognitive behaviors occur within, and can best be understood within, their particular institutional, cultural, and historical milieux.

4. Rethinking the Language of Cultural Difference

Our last suggestion for examining our assumptions about remediation and remedial students is to work toward a conceptualization of discourse that undercuts easy thinking about difference. This call is difficult, for it requires an engagement of the very language currently available to us to discuss school failure in a progressive way.

Research on cultural and class differences in communication and learning styles has revealed the coherence, purposiveness, and richness of behavior that has puzzled mainstream educators and resulted in harmful explanations and assessments of poor performance. Such research has moved us significantly toward a more democratic vision

of learning and schooling and, in some cases, has helped us successfully tailor instruction to fit students' needs (e.g., Au, 1980; Heath, 1983). But our time spent in remedial programs—reviewing curricula, talking to teachers and administrators, catching our own disturbing reactions to the literacy performances we saw—has made us uncomfortable with much of the research that focuses on differences, whether such difference grows out of the recognition that communication styles at school aren't like those at home or that people come to intellectual tasks in different ways. The problem is that all American educational research—ours and everyone else's—emerges from a culture in the grips of deficit thinking, and any analysis that delineates differences will run the risk of being converted to a deficit theory (Rose, 1988). We believe that a focus on differences, while potentially democratic and certainly instructive, can lead us to forget two things: 1) In fundamental ways we all possess the means to use language to make meaning; we all participate in fundamental linguistic and cognitive processes by virtue of our common humanity; and 2) Human beings, given the right social conditions, are astoundingly adaptive, and to determine what works against this adaptability, we need to look at the social and instructional conditions in the classroom rather than assume the problem is to be found in the cultural characteristics students bring with them. Two research-based observations are pertinent here. The first is from Asa Hilliard, and the second comes from Luis Moll and Stephen Diaz:

> I do believe that greater sensitivity to [learning] style issues will make meaningful contributions to pedagogy in the future. Yet I remain unconvinced that the explanation for the low performance of culturally different "minority" group students will be found by pursuing questions of behavioral style. Since students are adaptable, the stylistic difference explanation does not answer the question of why "minority" groups perform at a low level.... [C]hildren ... are failing primarily because of systematic inequalities in the delivery of whatever pedagogical approach the teachers claim to master—not because students cannot learn from teachers whose styles do not match their own (Hilliard, 1989, p. 68).

> Although student characteristics certainly matter, when the same children are shown to succeed under modified instructional arrangements it becomes clear that the problems ... working-class children face in school must be viewed primarily as a consequence of institutional arrangements that constrain children *and* teachers by not capitalizing fully on their talents, resources, and skills (Moll & Diaz, 1987, p. 302).

It is useful here to recall Ray McDermott's discussion of the way our society "keep(s) arranging for school failure to be so visible." "We might do better," he continues:

> to ask how it is a part of the situation of every minority group that it has had to be explained, or about the degradation every minority group has had to suffer from our explanations.... By making believe that failure is something that kids do, as different from how it is something that is done to them, and then by explaining their failure in terms of other things they do, we likely contribute to the maintenance of school failure. (McDermott, 1987, p. 362-3)

McDermott takes us all to task for our manufacture of failure, our entrapment in a way of thinking and of organizing society that virtually assures failure. We struggle within a discourse that yearns for difference, and difference, in our culture, slides readily toward judgment of better-or-worse, dominance, Otherness.

Yet the moment we express our concerns about a focus on difference, we must stop short. Without such a focus one can easily forget that "intellectual development is socially

and culturally based, and that what happens in the home, school, and local community ... is crucial to understanding the learning processes and academic achievement of all children, including minority children" (Trueba, 1988, p. 279). Such a perspective can lead to a greater appreciation of the richness of background, language, and gesture that comprise the United States. In fact, a focus on cognitive and linguistic *similarity* can shift readily to a levelling vision that not only reduces the variability that should be a cause for celebration, but, in its way, can also blind us to the political and economic consequences of difference. As Linda Brodkey (1989) puts it, a focus on similarity can distract us "from noticing the consequences of difference, namely, inequity" (p. 599). Given a history of diminishment, of a devaluation and ridicule of difference, it is not surprising that some members of historically subjugated groups want to move beyond an embrace of cognitive and linguistic similarity to an elevation of difference. Within French feminism and African American cultural studies, for example, some writers are arguing for the existence of distinctive female and Afrocentric epistemologies. Their move is to turn Otherness on its head, to celebrate ways of knowing that have been reduced and marginalized.

Given the culturally received ways we have to think about school failure in the United States, it seems that we have to keep these two perspectives in dynamic tension, see them as elements in a complex dialectic, a dialectic that can lead us to be alert to the ease with which we can make limiting, harmful judgments about linguistic and cognitive ability, the ease with which rich differences can be ignored or converted to deficits but the ease, as well, with which differences can be represented in essentialistic and deterministic ways that reduce human variability and adaptability. For that fact, we need to be vigilant that the very dialectic we want to honor does not degenerate into the kind of bipolar, better-worse scheme that has been so characteristic of our thinking about language use. To focus on the possible cultural or class differences of a student like Maria can both reveal the logic of her behavior and—given the ways we carry with us to react to difference—blind us to the shared cognitive and linguistic processes she displays. But to focus on the shared nature of Maria's cognitive and linguistic processes can blind us to the specifics of her background, and, further, can lead us to downplay variability and the way difference has been historically imbedded in inequity. To talk about difference in the United States, given our legacy of racism and class prejudice, requires us to talk, as well, about the many reductive, harmful ways difference has historically been represented. What we need to develop are conceptual frameworks that *simultaneously* assert shared cognitive and linguistic competence while celebrating in a non-hierarchical way the play of human difference.[13]

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Appendix A: Transcription Key for Contextualization Cues

Symbol	Significance
//	turn-final falling intonation
/	slight falling intonation suggesting more to come
?	rising intonation at the end of an intonational contour
,	holding intonation at the end of an intonational contour
-	truncation (either restart or interruption)
..	pauses of less than .5 seconds
...	pauses greater than .5 seconds (unless timed)
<2>	pauses timed precisely (= 2 second pause)
==	overlapping or latching speech
::	lengthened vowel
~	fluctuating intonation
*	accent, normal prominence
CAPS	accent, extra prominence
( )	unintelligible speech
(did)	good guess at an unclear word
(xxx)	unclear word, each "x" = one syllable
# #	extra-textual or background information
[ ]	non-lexical phenomena which interrupts the lexical stretch
{[ ]}	non-lexical phenomena which overlays the lexical stretch, such as: [p] quieter speech [f] louder speech [hi] high pitch [lo] low pitch [ac] accelerated speech [de] slower speech

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